Review to **Achieve Educational Excellence** in Australian Schools

Public submission made to the Review to Achieve Educational Excellence in Australian Schools

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Submitting as a: Other (Teacher Librarian on behalf of the ACT School Library Community)

State: ACT

Summary

School library services are the answer to many of the problems facing education in Australia - such as declining PISA results and the need to teach students differently to build the most important skills for success in an uncertain future workforce. Unfortunately, school library services are patchy around the country. Some schools recognise that they are more important than ever before in a world flooded with information. These schools are investing heavily in their qualified library staff and high quality resourcing. Other schools are caught up in myths like "All information is just a click away" or "Students 'just know' how to search online". These school libraries are being run by unqualified school support staff or being disbanded altogether. Getting the right person with the right support in each school library would transform educational outcomes across the country.

Main submission

Qualified teacher librarians, supported by qualified support staff, in a school library is key to the Future of Education in Australia. Domestic and international research supports what we see: the positive difference qualified library staff make within our own school communities. We wish the same for school communities who are missing out,

Some research:

- School libraries and teacher-librarians: evidence of their contribution to student literacy and learning
  http://www.curriculum.edu.au/leader/school_libraries_and_tls,36453.html?issueID=12777

- School libraries Work! http://www.scholastic.com.au/assets/pdfs/school-libraries-work.pdf

- School Libraries: the heart of 21st century learning - https://www.education.act.gov.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0020/916301/School-Libraries-21st-Century.pdf

What is the current situation in school libraries? What conditions/situations are preventing students from learning? Specific examples of what students can't do because of low staffing levels.

- My son (in Year 8) can't borrow books Mondays, Tuesdays or Wednesdays (!), and the library is being run by a school assistant with no library qualifications.

- Many school libraries are not open at lunchtimes - this prevents them from borrowing and limits their options for safe spaces during play time.

- There is a high school (7-10) library being run by the Principal's EA minding the Library at lunchtime, for loans, and the school assistant who manages the kitchens covering books chosen by English staff.

- There is another school (P-10) where the high school librarian has a .6 teaching load and is considered under-load so regularly gets another teaching load (.2) per week of in-built-relief, so there is very little time for Library support of students, staff and community or for developing the collection to resource the curriculum.

- Primary school TLs (the ⅓ of schools that have them) are timetabled in for release time lessons and cannot do the team teaching that is best practice for our profession. They also have very little (or no) time allocated for resourcing the curriculum. Teachers in these schools are spending hours of their own time finding resources to teach the Australian Curriculum.

- TLs unable to get class time to teach even the basic library orientation and research skills

- Decline in reading and comprehension - connected to teachers just relying on students googling for information without support. Most students waste a lot of time clicking through cluttered search results and are distracted by ineffective search strategies.

- Some principals have made the decision to send some or all of the non-fiction collection to the tip, despite evidence that some students prefer reading non-fiction to fiction, prefer reading hard copy to e-book, and that the reading level of what's available online is too difficult for some students. They are also not supplementing this lack of physical non-fiction resources with any age-appropriate digital non-fiction (e.g. digital databases).

- One school has moved from 1.5 Teacher Librarians within the library to potentially only 0.5 TL

- Most parents assume that there is a qualified teacher librarian at all schools and are shocked when they find out that's not true

How do school library services teach students the skills they need for the future? For example: Problem Solving, Written and Verbal Communication, Team Work, Creativity, Critical Thinking, Analysing and Interpreting Information.

- Teacher librarians help students know what questions to ask and guide them to the right places to find the answers. Then we help them change and modify their questions and their search terms as they go. We do this in a side-by-side personalised manner in the very moments when it's needed most. This is the PERFECT situation for optimal learning.

- Information can be gained from a variety of sources and Dr Google is not the be all – books are still useful. Pictures and posters provide information.

- We teach them skills (such as smart search strategies, website evaluation, taking and making notes) that can be applied across the school subjects.

- In Years 1/2 students learn how to use the Oliver (Orbit) library search interface to locate resources in the library. To help students understand how databases (including online search engines) work, we undertake a simulation where students first act as library cataloguers and then as a searcher or a computer. In the library cataloguers role, students work in pairs to identify key information about a library book. They have an A4 sheet of paper with five different coloured post-it notes on in. The paper represents a database record and the post-it notes are different fields. Students record the title, author, subjects, call number and series information about their book. We then put the records along a bench to represent a database. Several students are then chosen to act as searchers - they write their search terms on small pieces of paper and give these to the 'computers', who then have to return any relevant records (search results). We discuss computing terms such as 'inputs' and 'outputs', how spelling errors (either from the searcher or the cataloguer) could impact results, and which fields students think the computers should check for certain queries. This leads on to exploring how search filters work, as students can then see how when they conduct a search, they can control which fields they want a search function to check.

- I teach a unit in Years 3/4 where students have to analyse a number of websites to work out which ones are real and which are fake. They work in pairs using a Google Doc to record reasons why they think the sites are real or fake. Once they have finished their analysis, students compare and discuss their findings in small groups. After that we discuss the findings as a whole class and examine the criteria students are using to make their judgments,

identifying commonalities and establishing a list of important aspects to check when visiting a site.

- My TL partner and I have a popular presentation about "how to give an oral presentation" - teachers and students often request that we come in to discuss techniques for speaking and accompanying visuals. Teachers often report back that the quality of students' presentations has increased after having our help.

- In Years 5/6 we undertake a cybersafety unit where first we review cybersafety concepts taught in prior years. Students then work in small groups to analyse a given scenario (different scenario for each group) before creating a role play that presents the situation and their recommended cybersafe strategies for the scenario to the rest of the class.

- In my primary school, students come up to me all the time because they are stumped for what to read next. In the course of our conversation, they articulate what they are interested in, why the liked/did not like other things they've read, what search terms to use to find what they might like. These written and verbal communication skills help solve their problem, give them a greater understanding of themselves and how literature 'works' and also teach them how to help themselves in future.

- In my Senior Secondary School (Years 11/12 only), my job is largely about problem solving. Teachers and students seek me out when they have a problem and I teach them to solve it by working collaboratively and modelling techniques for and with them. When they leave me, they are better able to find information online, identify quickly and efficiently the best information to answer their question, reshape/reformulate their question into one that actually can be answered.

- Teachers work with me to refine their assignments - together we shape the tasks for the students so that they are tapping into students' higher order thinking skills (synthesising, evaluating, discussing) and so that the tasks are scaffolded appropriately with support for them to succeed. I come in to teach specific lessons as needed - about referencing, searching online, choosing good search terms, etc.

- Ethical use of ideas, information and images. Avoiding plagiarism and navigating the complexities of the modern intellectual property landscape.

- Our library runs a session about organising information. We teach the students about protocols for naming files and folders, about digital curation techniques and platforms to use. They love this because they recognise the positive impact it will have on their lives by saving them time! And many of

them have never been taught it before Year 11! This is because, unfortunately, most primary and some high schools in our area do not have qualified teacher librarians.

- Collaboratively plan lessons with classroom teachers examining websites, blogs and news articles that contain false information or unproven claims. We model active reading and consideration of content based on prior knowledge, examine the authority and reliability of the author as well as language and bias, and then cross-check content against other (reliable) sources to complete an authentic task. For example, students in a Sports Administration lesson examine real-world materials about the benefits of a kale and coconut oil diet and then provide advice to future hypothetical personal training clients about such a diet.

- When students have to complete a research task and the right information is difficult to locate from a straight-forward Google search, TLs teach students other possibilities (like journal databases) and how to use them, so that students can apply the same skills and knowledge to new situations. Different types of research tasks also help students develop skills in processes and project management. For example, would a survey provide useful supporting evidence? How should a survey be written and delivered? How can we deliver a survey without disrupting classes?

How do school libraries, TLs, and qualified library staff provide equity in our schools?

- Equal access to resources - physical and digital. This is especially important for students with low access to these things at home.

- Teacher librarians are all about personalised service -- They know their school community and they give each student and each teacher what they need at any given time. Equity is not about "sameness", it is about giving each person what they need to try to provide equal opportunities for the future.

- Providing resources based on need - equity vs equality

- More generous access to refugee students and other students in extraordinary circumstances - e.g. donated books/more lenient lending terms

- Providing lifelong learning skills - exactly the types of skills outlined in the Foundation for Young Australians report: Curiosity, problem solving, critical thinking, digital literacy.

- Providing resources in a variety of formats - audiobooks, eBooks that can have font enlarged, colour changed etc

- Contact with all students in the school throughout their school life.

- With this personal knowledge of students, library staff can cater to their interests to keep them reading.

- Access to technology that students may not have at home.

- Learning how to access technology WELL - which may not be being taught at home.

- Enables shared resources to be distributed equally with all classes/staff and students who require them.

- It is a space for the readers - they should have a space in the same way those interested in sport, ICT, art etc do.

- Through library classes, students are taught information literacy skills in the same depth and way that other essential skills are taught. Otherwise these skills are taught by classroom teacher who are not specialists in this area.

- Also (following on from point above) it is the TL's job to keep up to date with new applications, software and technologies related to information - this is not a priority for all teachers.

- Anyone can use the library space and resources - staff, students, parents

- TL can direct/help people find suitable materials - people come to see us when they are stuck

- Resources are shared by all

- No cost involved - therefore open to all

- Free access to resources - computer, ebooks, digital and physical resources

- Supporting curriculum-related resources for teachers and allowing for differentiation (of topic and ability)

- Sharing knowledge and upskilling all teachers (who then apply these skills to all students) - EXAMPLE: started a Google Doc for 'how to do things' for capacity building for staff e.g. copyright

- In special schools, TL works with staff to help them collect data and help students achieve their ILP goals in literacy through differentiation...thereby supporting implementation of PLPs and ILPs.

- Provide alternate spaces and activities for break times

- Address equity gaps for EALD students who need to develop the metalanguage and academic language to engage in their mainstream subjects.

- TLs have the time and expertise to work with students on skills that classroom teachers (who are time poor) often assume they have (e.g. taking/making notes, referencing, searching effectively online)

- responses to texts, and high-interest low-level readers to bridge the gap of reading and comprehension as well as exposure to literature). These result in improvement in NAPLAN literacy (especially from years 7 - 9) and value adds to literacy goals in school. This has been shown conclusively in the Softlink studies for years.

How does a teacher librarian make a difference in your school?

- Offers literature enrichment - read alouds to build knowledge of myths, legends, fairytales and different genres

- Providing a foundation for cultural literacy

- Offers a space that is safe to study, learn and seek assistance before and after school

- Provide a weekly Reading Cafe for students where we talk about books, attend author visits and other literary excursions

- Offers workshops and tutorials to staff and students on information literacy, Google Power Searching, the Deep Web, reciprocal reading and referencing.

- Assessment tasks with a research element are required to go through Secondary TLs before handed out to students. TLs look over the task for clarity, consistency, add recommended resources, provide feedback on question and task design. The teacher is the expert in the content and the TL is the expert in the "process" of how the student will do the assignment. We enhance and "lift" the quality of the assignment in this way.

- Competitions, rostrum, debating, chess, makerspace, CBCA, value add

- The neutral ear: TLs listen to staff from all teaching areas

- The ability for TLs to use questioning techniques with students and/or staff to help them frame their thinking or clarify their thoughts.

- Commitment to the whole school community, not only as across the curriculum informant but school based activities such as musicals, co-curricular, sporting carnivals etc, en extra staff member to participate in school activities

- Libraries are often the Mecca for individuality - TLs often support and encourage quirkiness, niche interests, passions

- Expertise in evaluating how best to resource teaching and learning programmes, balancing school financial restrictions, information access and student learning needs (eg. a set of Kobos or hard-copy texts for a class?)
- TL have a whole school perspective - eagle eye view
  - We have relationships with all teachers
  - We spread consistency across the school
  - We think of things that classroom teachers might not think of
  - We have a cross-sectional perspective that is different from classroom teachers. This is critical for problem solving.
- Relationships with staff from across the school so we are more across the needs of teachers and students no matter what subject area. We can spread great learning throughout the school.
- I am able to work with students on skills that the classroom teachers don't have the time to work on and thereby support learning in the classroom. For example yesterday I went into a year 7 class to help the teacher set up and execute a collaborative exercise, I was able to support the teacher and the students to successfully get their exercise underway and support the learning process they were undertaking

Closing statement

Our schools need school libraries, with teacher librarians and qualified library staff providing high quality services to students and staff. Having this in place across ALL of our schools guarantees best student outcomes for their time at school and beyond.

Considerations moving into 2018 and beyond:

High quality library services require staffing and time.

- Require each school in the Australia to have a school library (that provided non-fiction, fiction, print and electronic resourcing, not just a computer lab) with a qualified TL and qualified library staff (library technician, library assistant) –

The BEST teachers should be picked to be TLs

- Principals need to carefully select who they 'shoulder tap' to study and become TLs (job ads for TLs in schools in recent times have required applicants to be willing to undertake and gain TL qualifications while on the job, if not already qualified).

- The role of TL is highly challenging and requires a very capable, friendly, organised and proactive person to do it well.

RECOMMENDED FURTHER READING

Why we need qualified teacher librarians for the digital future

https://www.kinderling.com.au/kinderling-conversation/why-we-need-qualified-teacher-librarians-needed-for-the-digital-future

- Holly Godfree (ACT teacher librarian) from the Coalition Of Australian School Library Associations explains the importance of TLs to parents. (Thurs 12 October, 2017 - 8 mins).

- Defines the role of a teacher librarian, highlights the importance of the role of the teacher librarian in a digital world, and argues for qualified school library staff to create a school library team to support a school community.

The importance of school libraries in the Google Age

http://www2.curriculum.edu.au/scis/connections/issue_98/feature_article/importance_of_school_libraries_in_google_age.html

- This article is goes hand in hand with the latest report from the Foundation for Young Australians.

School Libraries, Teacher Librarians and Acceleration of Literacy (Kay Oddone).
https://elink.io/9c9df

- Links to School Libraries, Teacher Librarians and Students Achievement infographic (see next reading)

School Libraries, Teacher Librarians, and Student achievement

https://magic.piktochart.com/output/21604066-school-libraries-teacher-librarians-student-achievement

- Provides a visual literature review with further reading (created by Kay Oddone)